

Grasslands/Shrublands - Overview

Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests

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What are grasslands and shrublands?

- Grasslands and shrublands are those areas where the combination of soils, precipitation, topography, and natural role of fire results in the perpetuation of non-forested plant communities.
- Tisdale (1986)¹ identifies three grassland series, dominated by bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, or carex spp. and five shrubland series dominated by stiff sage, smooth sumac, curl leaf mountain mahogany, snowberry, and hackberry in the canyons of west-central Idaho and adjacent areas.
- The extent of the grasslands and shrublands within the forests can be estimated based upon the extent of non-forested areas as identified by Forest Inventory and Assessment plots (approximately 15% of the breaklands and <5% of the uplands are non-forest).

What are values associated with grasslands and shrublands?

- Wildlife habitat
- Ecological structure and function
- Grasslands support a disproportional number of rare plant species.
- Recreation, aesthetics, solitude, wilderness
- Livestock grazing

What are major stressing influences?

- Livestock grazing levels and practices (primarily historic)
- Invasive weeds
- Fire intensity, size, and frequency greater than natural conditions

What are current conditions?

- Specific information regarding the condition of grasslands and shrublands on the Forests is limited or non-existent.
- Recent information gathered within representative areas indicate >50% of these areas retain high native species integrity and <25% display low native species integrity.
- Canyon grasslands are especially vulnerable to invasive weeds. Many invasive weed species have the ability to flourish since they are adapted to hot, dry environments and are not particularly palatable to wildlife and livestock. The remote and rugged nature of the canyon grassland offer unique challenges for invasive weed management.

¹ Tisdale, E.W. 1986. Canyon Grasslands and Associated Shrublands of West-central Idaho and Adjacent Areas.